

Fortieth anniversaries with Latin American perspectives

One tragic and one combative anniversary in one year: the fortieth 11 September since US-led imperialism and the Chilean bourgeoisie decimated the Popular Unity experiment, and the fortieth year for this journal, indispensable to International Studies and an instrument in the armory of struggle, what Amílcar Cabral famously called “the weapon of theory”. LAP’s first issues bore an eerie link with the Chilean Spring, just as they now bear to the student-led struggle which has again placed radical social alternatives on the Chilean agenda. They debated the very conjuncture in which the peaceful road to socialism had been disastrously immersed, but at a continental level: the theoretical contest between dependency and imperialism, and the political struggle between reformism and revolution. Recent issues on Cuba have again drawn that tension into sharp focus, as the contradictions of post-soviet socialist development face the seductions of the post-Maoist Chinese road. These geographical extremes also bookend LAP’s historical-analytical sweep from mature revolution to mature counter revolution.

There has been a remarkable continuity between LAP’s original and contemporary aims, expressed in the near-verbatim then-and-now “top priority” to be accorded “articles which strike directly at the heart of the most important theoretical issues ... particularly subjects which have received inadequate discussion or are in sharp dispute.” (“Our views”, Vol. 1, Nº 1, no pp.). The collective has consistently applied its audacious support for relative unknowns or emerging scholars, alongside veterans, notably from Latin America: essential if one is to confront the capital-policed boundaries of theoretical exploration and their interaction with material reality. High standards of peer review emphasize collaboration once an article is accepted for publication, enhancing both it and LAP. The robust collective is marked by vigorous debate in a constructive atmosphere, ensuring that the historical practice developed both enriches and is in turn enriched. We relative newcomers stand on wise and solidary shoulders; not all critical journals enjoy this collective maturity.

As the long capitalist downturn which would lead to the current global crisis began, LAP’s inaugural pages minced no words. They rejected the safe and well-worn paths of “the many bourgeois journals and scholarly associations” which “disguise their support of the capitalist system in Latin America behind a facade of ‘academic neutrality’”, reminding us that “all scholarship has a political function.” LAP resisted, largely successfully, the policy studies turn which accompanied post modernism’s pinnacle in the 1980s and 1990s. Some debates, however, merit reconsideration as their contexts have changed dramatically over the decades. Can a European-generated body of theory—Marxism—adapt to García Márquez’s “impossible reality of Latin America”? Does Bolivarian socialism revive or refocus the Third World-First World social science debate? Are armed forces capable of revolutionary socialist practice in any sustained way? Have armed exile and gender struggle had adequate space? Has imperialism receded, or simply diversified? Are any NGO prototypes redeemable for the

Second Independence? How can LAP best support the struggle against institutionalized state terror? What should be the role of intellectual workers, both in the university and in the street? Does the journal speak to and energize popular intellectuals and activists?

A final word on the Unfinished Chilean Revolution. Forty years on, one need only live briefly in Chile to sense the vacuous, miserable, financially-enslaved and deeply-traumatized existence of the vast majority. Cuban health workers at a Santiago clinic are unanimous: "Chile now has no soul" (author interview, 2012). The Chilean Left itself continues to dispute the recent past, though more constructively now that "Berlusconi con Poncho" has starkly reminded all that Pinochet is far from departed. The catalyst for this positive turn has been the bold student mobilizations, less dependant on Left party politics than traditionally holds, generating a new if not unique history. Somewhere between this Chile and that Cuba lies the future of twenty-first century socialism, a worthy theme for LAP's future.

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